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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS

Summary

-- Lead stories in all papers published today, February 1, continue to focus on the aftermath of Hamas' victory in the Palestinian legislative elections. Majority of writers today seem to focus on the impact of this victory on Jordan as they explore and analyze the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan and Hamas on both sides of the River.

Editorial Commentary

-- "Is Hamas' win a dilemma or an opportunity?"

Former Jordanian Ambassador to the UN Hassan Abu Ni'mah writes on the op-ed page of centrist, independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad (02/01): "Not much is left to say about Hamas' landslide victory in the Palestinian elections. The Palestinian voter punished the Authority for its corruption and incompetence and punished Fatah for its hegemonic ruling over Palestinian politics for four decades. This said, it should not nullify the other factors, most important of which is the fact that the Authority's incompetence and the spread of corruption stems in the first place from the failure of the so-called peace process. Responsibility for this lies on the shoulders of more than one party. The United States is involved as it encouraged Israel to impede all peace efforts and transferred peace projects into tranquilizing and time-gaining tools so that Israel can implement settlement and expansion plans and fix the new facts on the ground before allowing any serious negotiations to even begin.. Responsibility for the desperation that prevailed among the Palestinian people is also shared by the European Union that agreed to be a member of the 'Quartet' and to finance the Palestinian National Authority not to build Palestinian institutions and infrastructure, but to enable the Authority to become a security and administrative agent for the occupation and for the occupier in order to ease the latter's burden as it continued to entrench its illegitimate gains on the ground.. Also sharing the responsibility is the United Nations and its Secretary General who succumbed and agreed to turn an organization that represents more than 190 world countries into a mere member in the Quartet committee who task is to inject the region with tranquilizers and present illusionary peace projects only to make believe that there is a peace process.. We heard the cries of pain everywhere following Hamas' win, because it is 'a terrorist organization' that wants to destroy the state of Israel. We also heard threats of cutting assistance from the Palestinians if Hamas takes part in the government. If Hamas were a terrorist organization and as such received all this legitimate democratic and electoral support from the Palestinians, then the Palestinian people are terrorists too and may have become so because the occupation that goes back to 1967 turns people into terrorists! Why have we not heard a single word about the occupation and the need for it to end in line with relevant international resolutions? Why have we not heard a single word about the violation of Palestinian rights, the confiscation of their lands, the despicable wall, the settlements, the arrests, the check points, the siege and the daily attacks? We understand fully that Hamas, as a resistance organization, is not and should not be Hamas, the elected government. We understand that Hamas' participation in the elections means its implicit acceptance of the general framework for establishing authority, and we also understand that Hamas must accept and declare its commitment to peace in line with international resolutions and the Arab initiative. What we do not understand is this language of threats, conditions and boycott that prevailed even before the official results were announced, before a government is formed, and before that government announces its policies.. Hamas' election is a Palestinian decision that we ought to

respect and deal with in the spirit of democracy that is continuously called for. Let this development be an opportunity to set straight the peace path, not to continue on the same path that has led the region towards conflict and violence and absolute failure. Cooperation from everyone inside and outside Palestine is required at this point for the sake of Palestinian interests."

-- " Hamas is qualified for the position of authority"

Columnist Ibrahim Gharaibeh writes on the op-ed page of Al-Ghad (02/01): "Of course Hamas is not expected to achieve miracles. It will not liberate Palestine even to the 1967 borders. It will not regain Palestinian sovereignty over Jerusalem. It will not bring back home the Palestinian refugees. But it will be able to achieve a certain level of security and political stability and resume the public, economic and educational life. Moreover the Palestinians are depending a great deal on Hamas in fighting corruption, and it may succeed in freeing some or many of the prisoners. Of course, it will stand up to every military action against Israel and it will arrest anyone who does or tries to do a military action against Israel, and it does have popular and historical legitimacy that qualifies it to make bold decisions. Hamas' rule is not going to be a shift or a turn in the Palestinian, Arab and international scene, but it is going to be a shift in old policies and alliances and a signaling of a new political stage where Islamic movements rule with western, and Israeli, coordination and where major western interests and strategies do not change, which is all right as long as there is a certain degree of freedom, justice, anti-corruption and a reformulation of centers of influence."

-- "The first official contact between the government and the Movement"

Columnist and political analyst Fahd Kheetan writes on the inside page of independent, opposition Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (02/01): "The government waited a few days before it congratulated the Hamas movement on its victory in the elections. A good step that undoubtedly casts aside all skepticism about the Jordanian stand.. Obviously, the Jordanian government chose [to contact] Hamas in the Palestinian territories for two reasons. The first is the tense relations it has with the movement's leaders outside the territories, mainly with Khaled Mish'al, and the second is that the people concerned with arrangement in the upcoming stage are the Hamas leaders in Gaza and the West Bank. The most significant development in Jordan's position vis--vis developments in the Palestinian arena is represented by what King Abdullah said during his meeting yesterday with the Palestinian President. The King explicitly declared his support for the choice of the free Palestinian people and indicated Jordan's readiness to continue coordination with the Palestinian side, in addition to adopting a supportive stand of the Palestinian people in the face of international threats to cut off assistance following Hamas' win as the King said that the price of such a measure would only be paid by the Palestinian people. It was known right from the beginning that Jordan cannot ignore Hamas after its victory in the elections. While Hamas is required to be realistic and to surpass the stage of slogans and mottos now that it is in a ruling position, Jordan is also required to overcome the past and flip a new page with Hamas. Jordan's role in the upcoming stage will focus on helping Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas convince Hamas of the need to deal with the facts on the ground and to resume the peace process that has been unilaterally frozen by Israel. In other words, Jordan is going to try to cooperate with Abu Mazen to train the Hamas movement on slowly entering the maze of the peace process.. Jordan fears that the peace process would be frozen once extremists from both sides take over.. Jordan will then be in a difficult regional position. That is why observers say that guaranteeing Jordan's security interests is going to be the lead topic of King Abdullah's discussions with U.S. administration officials next week."

-- "The Islamic Action Front and Hamas"

Chief Editor Taher Udwan writes on the back-page of Al-Arab Al-Yawm (02/01): "It is a mistake to move the issue of Hamas' victory from Palestine to Jordan and turn it into an internal issue with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Action Front. What happened across the River had its conditions and circumstances that are completely different from the

political climate in Jordan.. Reading into Hamas' victory must not go beyond its natural borders of the Palestinian context and the people's struggle for liberation. Hamas is not and will not be the 'Islamic revolution in Iran' to be exported to the outside.. Of course, there are connections and mutual impacts between the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan and the Brotherhood in Palestine, including the Hamas movement. But the formula of this relationship has always revolved around Hamas' need for the support of the Brotherhood in Jordan as being a resistance movement against the Israeli occupation of Palestine, a pivotal and central cause for all the Arabs. I do not believe that Hamas' win is going to change this formula.. On the other hand, any wrong reading on the part of any party in Jordan of Hamas' victory . is going to stir fears and worry amidst many nationalist parties, something that might encourage the enemies of democracy and reform to take advantage of these fears in order to postpone reform and impede the progress towards democracy. It is the right of the Islamic Action Front to work towards attaining governmental positions. After all, it does have its national program, and, moreover, that is the point of democracy and the objective of reform."

RUBINSTEIN